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THE WORTH OF THE SOUL.

A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT WESTPORT, CONN.,

AT THE

ORDINATION

OF

REV. JOSEPH D. STRONG,

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SERMON.

"For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?—Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"—*Matt.* xvi: 26.

This was the language of one who knew perfectly well the value of the soul, and the value of the world; for he was the creator of them both. He knew to what glory and blessedness the soul of man is capable of rising, and to what degradation and wretchedness it is capable of sinking. He knew what heaven is, and what hell is. He could look through eternity, and trace the soul in its endless progress of holiness or sin, and estimate the amount of bliss or wo to which it is destined. He knew also how short-lived and unsatisfying are those worldly objects which engross the attention of mortals; and how poorly they are able to compensate the loss of salvation. He knew the danger to which the soul is exposed. He was perfectly acquainted with the character of man, his aversion to holiness, his proneness to sin, his attachment to the world, and his disposition to look at those things which are seen and which are temporal, and to disregard those things

which are not seen and which are eternal; and he solemnly warns us in the text, to take heed that we do not barter our souls for the perishing vanities of time. "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

The text will lead us to contemplate the worth of the soul, and the danger of losing it.

THE WORTH OF THE SOUL APPEARS:—

I. From the character which it is destined to sustain. It is from this, indeed, that the soul derives all its value. Why is man more excellent than the beasts? What is it which exalts him in the scale of being above the brute creation? It is the intellectual and moral character which he possesses. And when we trace this character in its future developments, it stamps inconceivable value upon the soul.

Our souls are capable of indefinite improvement. The faculties of our minds have but just begun to open and expand. It was but yesterday that we wakened into being. We have just opened our eyes on a vast, immeasurable field of knowledge. And what limits can be set to the improvement of our minds, and to the extent of our knowledge? When will the human mind have attained to its highest state of intellectual improvement? When will it have acquired all the knowledge of which it is capable? Where is the boundary that will stay its progress? When will it become stationary? Never, never. It will go on, expanding and accumulating

knowledge, when suns and moons and stars shall cease to shine, and while the eternal God shall live.

We possess also a moral character, and shall always possess a moral character, either sinful or holy. Nor will this character ever become stationary. As our intellectual powers expand, and the sphere of our knowledge enlarges, our moral affections will increase in strength and intensity, and we shall be making progress in holiness or in sin forever.

Now, my hearers, fix your thoughts one moment on a single soul. Trace it in its endless progress, and think of the character which it is destined to sustain.

Suppose, in the first place, that it shall be sanctified and saved. The moment it quits the clay tenement, it wakes up an angel of light. All its moral pollution is washed away. It is a pure spirit, holy as God is holy. Now trace it in its progress. See its faculties expanding. See it increasing in knowledge, and in holiness, and in enjoyment. See it rising from one degree of glory to another, outstripping the present attainments of Cherubim and Seraphim, and thence stretching onward toward the infinite God. What is that soul destined to become? What a weight of glory is reserved for it! Truly, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

But let us reverse the scene. Suppose the soul persists in impenitence, and is lost. The moment it

leaves the body, it wakes up a fiend of darkness. It carries into eternity all its enmity to God, all its hatred of holiness, and all its malignant passions. Every restraint is now removed, and it is left to grope its dark and dreary progress in guilt and wretchedness forever. Trace it in its progress. See its intellectual powers expanding, its knowledge increasing, and its enmity to God, and hatred of holiness, becoming more and more inveterate. See it wailing in the horrors of despair, cursing the day when it was brought into being, and blaspheming the God who gave it existence. O, what is that soul destined to become? How soon it will surpass in intelligence, yes, and in depravity too, the present character of the foulest spirit of the nether world. And behold it thence going onward, increasing in knowledge and in depravity forever. Tell me, my hearers, tell me, "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul."

II. The worth of the soul appears from its capacity for enjoyment. Happiness is the only natural good; and the value of every thing is estimated from its capacity to enjoy, or its tendency to promote happiness. Think then how much happiness one soul is capable of enjoying, and how much it actually will enjoy, provided it shall be saved. It is impossible for us to form any adequate conceptions on this subject; yet I hazard nothing when I say, that one soul which shall be saved will enjoy more happiness than has ever yet been enjoyed by all

created beings in the universe. Think then, one moment, how much happiness has been enjoyed. How much has been enjoyed by the successive generations which have peopled the globe. How much has been enjoyed by almost every individual; for great and multiplied as are the woes of man, he is not destitute of enjoyment. There are pleasures of sense, intellectual pleasures, pleasures of society, pleasures of imagination, and moreover the pleasures of religion, enjoyed by those who have tasted and seen that the Lord is good. Think how many millions have inhabited the earth; and what an amount of happiness they must have enjoyed. Then transport yourselves to other worlds. Suppose that every planet in our system is another world, peopled by holy and happy intelligences. Suppose that every star which twinkles in the firmament is another sun, around which other worlds revolve, all peopled by holy and happy intelligences. Now add all the happiness which you can imagine may have been enjoyed in all these worlds, to what has been enjoyed on earth;—and to this add all which has been enjoyed by saints and angels in heaven; and the time will come in eternity, when one soul, which shall be saved, will have enjoyed more than all this. Tell me then, my hearers, "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

III. The worth of the soul appears from its capacity for suffering. We are made capable not

only of enjoying an inconceivable degree of happiness, but of suffering an inconceivable degree of misery. Fix your thoughts then on the condition of one lost soul, and think of the amount of suffering which that soul must endure. Here again all calculations fail us;—but I hazard nothing when I say, that one soul that shall be lost, will endure more misery than has ever yet been endured throughout the universe of God. And think how much misery has been endured. How much has been endured on this earth since the Fall of man. Even while I am speaking, how many thousand eyes are streaming in wretchedness; how many thousand hearts are bursting with anguish; how many thousands of our fellow men are this moment writhing in the agonies of death. And what moment has there been since the Fall, when this world did not present to an omniscient eye a spectacle of wo? Think of the millions who have lived and died on this globe; and think how much pain of body, and how much keener anguish of mind, must have been endured by this countless multitude. Then turn your thoughts to the world of despair. Think how much must have been endured by the apostate angels since their expulsion from heaven; and how much by the myriads who have gone from this world to hell:—and you may add to this all that will be endured on earth and in hell, from this time to the day of judgment; and the period will come in eternity, when one soul that shall be lost, will have endured more than all this. Tell me then, my hearers, tell me,

"What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

IV. The worth of the soul appears from the price paid for its redemption. And what was this price? Was it thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil? Or was it mountains of gold and silver? No!—"We are not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ." And would nothing else suffice? Must the Son of God become incarnate, and suffer and die upon the cross? Yes, all the treasures of the universe beside were not sufficient to pay the ransom. "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission." And the sacrifice of no created being, however exalted, would answer the purpose. Would you then learn the worth of the soul, see it in the humiliation, sufferings and death of the Son of God. See the eternal Father giving up his Son, and laying upon him the sins of the world. See the Saviour voluntarily assuming our nature, becoming a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and submitting to the ignominy and agonies of the cross;—and remember all this was necessary for the redemption of the soul. Surely, if the soul had not been of infinite value, this sacrifice never would have been made.

V. What stamps infinite value upon the soul, is its immortality. This has been repeatedly alluded to in the preceding remarks; but it is deserving of a distinct consideration. We have commenced an exist-

ence, my hearers, which will never terminate. And have you ever seriously thought on that word—ETERNITY? Have you ever brought it before your minds as an object of distinct contemplation, and endeavored to realize its momentous import? Have you deliberately weighed the solemn alternative before you—*eternal life* or *eternal death*? If you viewed yourselves exposed to extreme suffering for a limited period of great extent, say for a thousand years, would it not awaken in your minds the deepest solicitude? But what are a thousand years, or a million years, or a thousand million years, when compared with eternity? Stretch your conceptions to their greatest extent; conceive of the longest period of duration which your minds can possibly grasp; do you make any progress towards the end of eternity? Suppose a number of years denoted by a row of figures which should reach from this earth to the remotest fixed star—let all these years roll away—Will eternity be ended? Strictly speaking, will it be diminished? Permit me to make another supposition, which I recollect to have heard or read many years ago: Suppose this world were to be removed into the regions of infinite space, by a little insect—an insect so small that he could carry but one particle at a time, and to a distance so great that he could go and return but once in a thousand years. How long would it take to remove the world? Suppose this work accomplished, would eternity be ended? Strictly speaking, would it be diminished? Would there not be a whole eternity still to ensue? Other

worlds might be removed in the same manner—all the worlds of the solar system—all the worlds which compose the material universe might be removed in the same manner, and still eternity would not be ended. Meanwhile, you and I, my hearers, shall live; and shall be praising God and the Lamb in Heaven, or uttering the groans and blasphemies of hell. Tell me then, my hearers, "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

Let us now contemplate the danger of losing the soul.

And is there danger? It would seem that the bare possibility of such an event would be sufficient to alarm us. If there were but one chance in ten thousand that we should lose our souls, it would be a sufficient reason for the deepest solicitude. But there is more than a bare possibility of losing the soul; there is *actual danger* of it. For,—

I. It is certain that many will be lost. Many have already been lost. Where are the inhabitants of the Old world, who were swept away by the deluge? The apostle informs us that they are now spirits in prison. Where are the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah? They are "set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." Where are the Israelites whose carcases fell in the wilderness, and who could not enter the promised land because of unbelief? Where are the guilty nations of Canaan, whose measure of iniquity was full, and who were

swept away with the besom of destruction? Where are the Jews, who in the days of our Saviour rejected the counsel of God against themselves? He said to them, "Ye shall die in your sins, and where I am, thither ye cannot come." He said, also, "Straight is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. But wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat." At the last great day, "when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory, and before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them"—Yes, "he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on his left." And he shall say to them on his left hand, "depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment." It is certain, therefore, that many will be lost.

II. There is a subtle and busy adversary, whose whole business is to seek the ruin of souls. "Be sober, be vigilant," says the apostle, "for your adversary, the devil, goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." Another apostle says, "But I fear, lest as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity there is in Christ." And

is there then no danger? Have we such an adversary—one so powerful—so subtle—so unremitting in his efforts, and so constantly employed in spreading snares for our feet?—Is there no danger of losing the soul?

III. That which constitutes the principal danger, is the depravity of the human heart—the aversion of mankind to holiness—their love of sin—and their proneness to procrastinate a preparation for death. There is a way prepared by which they may be saved. A door of hope is opened. A Saviour has been provided, and salvation is freely offered. All who will repent and come to Christ may escape impending wrath, and secure eternal life. But mankind are not disposed to comply with these reasonable terms. They will not come to Christ that they may have life. With one consent, they all begin to make excuse. They love their sins, and will not forsake them. They hate the duties of religion, and will not perform them. A thousand worldly objects solicit their attention; and they say to every messenger of mercy, "Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee." They turn a deaf ear to every call and every warning, and rush with presumptuous boldness on the thick bosses of the Almighty's buckler. They put far off the evil day, and cry—"Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep." They dream of future days, and flatter themselves that there is time enough yet to secure their

immortal interests. In the meantime, their hearts are becoming harder; their consciences are becoming seared; their attachment to the world is gaining strength; their aversion to holiness is increasing; the difficulties in the way of repentance are accumulating; and the danger is becoming greater and greater, every day, that they will not be saved. Meanwhile, also, the arrows of death are flying thick around them, and one and another are dropping into the grave, and into perdition. What multitudes are standing in this perilous condition! and yet nothing alarms them. No motives which we can present to their minds have any influence to affect their hearts, or to stimulate them to make one effort to secure their salvation. We may set before them the terrors of a broken law, and the fiercer terrors of a rejected gospel; we may point them to a bleeding Saviour; we may remind them of the solemn day when they will lie on the bed of death; we may point them to the scenes of the judgment; we may set before them that eternity to which they are hastening; we may bring down the New Jerusalem, and show them the joys of Paradise; we may uncover the pit, and let them listen to the shrieks and groans of the damned;—But all in vain! They still slumber on. They still cry peace and safety. They still march blindfold toward the precipice, from which thousands before them have plunged into remediless wo. And is there, then, no danger? Yes, my hearers, so great is the danger, that all who are not lost will be *scarcely* saved. The

righteous will be *scarcely* saved. Where, then, shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

If such is the worth of the soul, and the danger of losing it, how immense the responsibility of the ministers of Christ! What is the minister's great business? To watch for souls. For this he is to study, to labor, and to pray; to be instant in season and out of season; to spend and be spent. His business is not to seek wealth or fame for himself, or to save the lives, or protect the estates of his fellow men; but to seek the salvation of their souls. He is Christ's ambassador, sent to negotiate a peace between rebellious men and their offended God, that they may escape impending wrath, and secure eternal life. He is to "warn, and exhort, and rebuke, with all long-suffering and doctrine,"—to "cry aloud and spare not," —to lift up his voice like a trumpet, and to show to his people their transgressions and their sins; and to beseech and warn them, by all that is glorious in heaven, and all that is dreadful in hell, to flee from the wrath to come, and lay hold on the hope set before them in the gospel.

How do all the common employments of men dwindle into insignificance, when compared with the minister's work! All these employments have reference to the petty concerns of time; but the minister's work has reference to the concerns of eternity. The results of his labors shall be seen when this earth and these heavens shall have passed away, and when this material universe shall have crumbled into ruins. "He that converteth a sinner

from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death."—Not a body, but a soul—a soul of more value than all the worlds which Jehovah ever made. O, give me this honor, and heroes may wear their laurels, and kings may sway their scepters, and I will not envy their lot. How happy must be that minister, who, after having faithfully executed his commission, shall meet at the Judgment the souls he has been instrumental of rescuing from ruin. With what transports of joy will he present them to Christ, saying—"Here am I, Lord, and the children whom thou hast given me."

But how wretched must be that man, who has been a blind leader of the blind—who has assumed the sacred office, and neglected its duties, and through whose unfaithfulness souls have been lost forever. How solemn and awful will be the scene, when he shall meet his hearers at the bar of God, and find that he has been instrumental in their destruction! How can he hear their reproaches? How can he endure the stings of his own guilty conscience? How can he meet the frown of his angry Judge? It appears to me, that if there shall be any guilty wretch among the congregated millions at the Judgment, on whom the Judge will look with peculiar abhorrence, and towards whom all eyes will be turned, as a signal object of divine indignation, it will be the ungodly minister, in whose skirts shall be found the blood of souls.

O, my brethren, we watch for souls as they that must give account! And how solemn will be that

account! And how fearful will be the consequences of being found unfaithful! Hear what God said to the prophet Ezekiel:—"Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel. Therefore, thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O, wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand."

Acting under such responsibility, shall we be unfaithful? Shall we sleep at our post? Shall we suffer this vain world to engross our thoughts? Shall we consult our ease, or wealth, or fame? Shall we make it our object to please men? Shall we fear the face of clay, and shun to declare all the counsel of God? Shall we become weary in well-doing, relax our efforts, and cry—"Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep," while sinners are slumbering around us, on the brink of perdition? Or, shall we not preach as dying men to dying men, and watch, and pray, and labor, as those who expect soon to give an account of their stewardship? Do you ask—"Who is sufficient for these things?" Alas! brethren, no man is sufficient for these things. The great apostle felt his utter insufficiency. And if there is a man on earth who feels himself sufficient, it is full proof that he is ignorant of himself and of the nature of the work.

> " 'Tis not a cause of small import,
> The Pastor's care demands;
> But what might fill an angel's heart—
> It filled a Saviour's hands."

But God has seen fit to commit this treasure, not to angels, but to earthen vessels—to frail, dying, sinful men, that the excellency of the power may be of Him. And, my brethren, though we have no sufficiency of ourselves, God's grace is sufficient for us. Though in our own strength we can do nothing, through Christ strengthening us we can do all things. And he has said—"Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." This is enough; we need not despond. Great as our work is, awful as is the responsibility connected with it, and feeble and insufficient as we are, we may trust in all-sufficient grace, and we shall not find our confidence vain. Let us, then, gird up our loins, and go to our work with fresh courage and zeal; let us "be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as we know that our labor shall not be in vain in the Lord."

Again: If such be the worth of the soul, and the danger of losing it, how great the responsiblity of all the professed followers of Christ. My Christian brethren, do you indulge the belief that, through the infinite riches of divine grace, you have been rescued from eternal death, and made heirs of eternal life; and can you fail to feel a deep and lively interest in the welfare of those who are still in the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity? Are not

their souls as precious as your own? Are they not, like you, hastening to the judgment seat of Christ, and to a state of endless retribution? And can you think of their perilous condition without deep emotion, and without asking yourselves—What can we do to bring these souls to Christ, that they may share with us in the rich blessings of redeeming love? Can you look upon sinners around you, who have no hope, and who are without God in the world, and whose souls are in jeopardy every hour, with cold indifference? If so, how dwelleth the love of God in you? Is this the spirit of the gospel? Is this the spirit which moved the Son of God to lay down his life for a perishing world?

Christian brethren, you remember the wormwood and the gall. You remember the solemn day when you first realized the worth of your own souls; when you saw yourselves condemned sinners, exposed to the sorrows of the Second death. How did you then feel? What did you then think of the condition of an unconverted sinner? Did you not wish christians to take an interest in your welfare! Did you not wish them to pray most earnestly for your salvation? And did they not pray for you? And did not God hear their prayers, and reach forth his arm of mercy to bring you up out of the horrible pit and miry clay, and to set your feet upon a rock? And now, my brethren, if there is anything which you can do for those souls which are perishing around you, will you not do it? Do you ask—"What can we do?" You cannot change their

hearts; but you can pour into their minds the light of a holy example. You can warn them of their danger. You can bear them on your hearts to the throne of grace. And who can tell, but God may hear your prayers, and bless your efforts, and make you the happy instruments of saving souls from death.

And let the considerations which have been suggested be duly weighed by all my hearers.

When I look around upon this assembly, I do not see an individual who is not destined to live forever. Each one of you has an immortal soul, to be saved or to be lost. And is your salvation secured? Have you evidence that your names are in the book of life? Have you fled for refuge, and laid hold on the hope set before you in the gospel? Have you passed from death unto life? Have you been translated from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son? Have you become new creatures? Have old things passed away, and all things become new? And have you now in your hearts an earnest of the heavenly inheritance? I fear there are those here who cannot answer these questions in the affirmative. I fear there are those who are obliged to answer them in the negative. And, my dear friends, do you intend to be lost? No—there is not an individual here who intends to be lost. I presume there is not an individual here who really and firmly believes that he shall be lost; perhaps not many, if any, who are seriously afraid that they shall be lost. And here lies the greatest danger.

This false security is the most alarming symptom in your case. If we could see you sensible of your true character and condition, and, with trembling solicitude, inquiring "What shall we do?" we should feel that there was more hope in your case. And why are you not thus solicitous? What means this spiritual apathy, when there is but a step between you and death, and between you and perdition? If your property is in danger, you are alarmed. If your character is at stake, you are alarmed. And why are you not alarmed, when your immortal interests are in jeopardy? Perhaps I can explain the reason. You have in your minds a resolution that, at some future time, and in some convenient season, you will repent, and believe the gospel. With this resolution you quiet your consciences, and silence your fears. But let me tell you, this resolution is good for nothing; and if God in mercy does not prevent, you will as certainly break it as you have made it. It is now only blinding your eyes, and hardening your hearts, and leading you on to ruin. Have you not seen enough of your own hearts, to learn that no confidence is to be placed in such resolutions? How many have you already made and broken? And what multitudes, who once flattered themselves in this manner, are now beyond the reach of help and hope? Go, look into the regions of despair. What multitudes are now lifting their eyes in despair, who once indulged as fond anticipations of future happiness as any of you! Once they had a season of probation, and the offer of

eternal life. Once they sat and heard the gospel, as you sit and hear it to-day; felt, perhaps, as you now feel; resolved as firmly as you ever resolved, that they would repent before they should die. They did not intend to be lost. They all intended to comply with the conditions of pardon before the day of grace should close. But they deferred it, and deferred it till death came as a thief in the night, and they are gone—gone forever! And God only knows how soon this may be the case of some who are now listening to my voice. My impenitent hearers, are you ready to repent now? If not, why? Why not now? Why can you wish to postpone a matter of such momentous interest another day or another hour? The only reason is, that your hearts are now so hard. But do you not know that they will be harder to-morrow, harder yet next day, and harder still next year, should you live? Do you not know that your love of sin, and aversion to holiness are constantly gaining strength, and that the probability that you will ever repent is daily decreasing? Look back to days that are past. Are you any more inclined to commence a religious life now, than you were several years ago? Or is it not true that you are less inclined? What then are your prospects? Meanwhile what security have you of life? Do you not know that you live in a dying world; that you are walking over open graves? And that, for ought you know, the very next step you take may be your last? Do you not know that you hang by a brittle thread over the abyss of wo, and that that

thread is in the hand of your offended God? Long has the voice of justice cried before the throne—"Cut them down, cut them down; for why cumber they the ground?" And mercy, with feebler, and still feebler accents, intercedes—"Spare them a little longer." Soon the voice of Mercy will be heard no more; the voice of Justice will prevail; the brittle thread will be sundered, and you sink, to rise no more.

If you lose your souls, my hearers, the loss will be final and irretrievable. If you lose a hand, you have another. If you lose an eye, you have another. But if you lose your soul you have not another. If you lose your property, it may possibly be regained. If you lose your character, it may possibly be retrieved. But the soul once lost, is lost for ever. "There remaineth no more sacrifice for sin." There will be no other season of probation. He that is holy at death, will be holy still; and he that is filthy then, will be filthy still.

My impenitent hearers, I am permitted to bring you glad tidings to-day. I am permitted to say to every sinner in this assembly, you have now an opportunity to secure the salvation of your soul. Yes! it is yet with you a day of grace. Salvation is still offered to you. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come; and let him that is athirst, come, and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." The door of heaven still stands open. There is still a pardoning God. There is still a Throne of Grace to which you may resort. It is not yet too late for you to secure

the immortal prize. But it is too late for that sinner that died to-day! His day of grace is past. His day of grace is closed. His doom is irrevocably fixed. And, to-morrow, it may be too late for you. How precious then are these moments of probation!

"While God invites, how blest the day;
How sweet the Gospel's charming sound!
Come, sinners, haste, O haste away,
While yet a pard'ning God he's found!"

"Soon will the harvest close,
The summer soon be o'er;
And soon your injured, angry God,
Will hear your prayer no more!"